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What Does Richard Wagner Relate Concerning The Origin of His Nibelungen Poem and How Does He Interpret it?

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WHAT DOES
RICHARD WAGNER
RELATE CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF HIS
NIBELUNGEN POEM

BY

S. RÖCKL

TRANSLATED BY C. PARRISH

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WHAT DOES
RICHARD WAGNER
RELATE CONCERNING THE

ORIGIN OF HIS NIBELUNGEN POEM

AND HOW DOES HE INTERPRET IT?

1853—1903

COMPILED
FROM EPISTOLARY UTTERANCES OF THE MASTER
BY

S. RÖCKL

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH
BY
CONSTANCE DE C. PARRISH

LONDON, BREITKOPF & HÄRTEL, 1907

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INTRODUCTION.

"I was 36 years old, before I divined the exact substance of my artistic impulse; up till then Art counted for me as the aim, and Life as the means. But the discovery came, of course, too late, and only tragic experiences could answer to my new bent in life. One glance into the world of the present shows us that Love is at present quite impossible; one of my friends, for instance, could certainly call out to the Germans: 'You do not understand Love at all: for how can men want to love, who possess no initiative of character? That is quite impossible'. If it mean therefore, to try to save oneself by some makeshift, I can, in that case, find no better one than the frankest insight into the conditioned order of things, the open avowal of truth, even though there be no other profit to be derived from it for oneself but the pride of perception, and finally the will and the endeavour to show Mankind, by the disclosure of this perception, the means for its redemption. In this way, certainly, we turn to the whole of Humanity, but only just as a makeshift, because we perceive that the Individual cannot be happy by himself, as only when all men are happy, can he feel content. You see, that by saying this, I quite take your point of view, only I look upon this point of view, not as the end, but only as a means, as a way to my goal; this goal however, will not be understood yet by the majority; it is: Love being rendered possible as the fullest perception of Reality: — Truth; not however, the reasoned, abstracted, non-sensual (for us at present the only possible) Love, but the Love of the 'I' and 'You'.

Consequently I cannot look upon the tremendous efforts of the human race, and also at present of each and every

science, otherwise than as ways and means to the goal, which in itself is such an infinitely simple, and yet such a divine result. I respect, consequently, each of these endeavours, perceive a necessity in every step, and am heartily glad when these steps occur, but personally, I already see the simple goal so near at hand, that it is impossible for me to turn forcibly away from it, in order to participate in those efforts, (which are fundamentally really unconscious of the goal); only the need of a great Movement could bring me to this self-denial; this I should welcome, as my only possible redemption.

But will you take it amiss now if I can only reply with a smile to your advice, to turn away from dreams and egoistic enthusiasms in order to devote myself to the single reality of actual life and its efforts, and that on the other hand I believe that I am devoting myself much more definitely, consciously, and immediately to real existence by using each of my utterances of Life, even those most full of suffering, solely towards that goal and its demonstration?...

There remains now only to denote what I feel urged to do at present, from my point of view, in order to bring myself, and Humanity at the same time, near to my perceived goal of Humanity, (which must remain barred to me individually, because all still shut themselves out from it), without meddling with those means of which I cannot make any more use. To this end my Art must help me, and the Work which I designed with this meaning, is my 'Nibelungen Poem'."

(WAGNER to AUGUST RÖCKL,[1]) Zurich, Jan. 25th, 1854.)

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1) Röckl having, like Wagner, participated in the Rising of May, 1849, was first condemned to death, but subsequently to imprisonment for life. He spent 13 years in the 'House of Correction' at Waldheim.

"The lies and hypocrisy of the political parties filled me with a loathing, which drove me back in the first instance into the most complete seclusion.

Here my unquenched outward impulse again consumed itself in artistic projects. Two such projects, which had already occupied me for some time, now rose almost simultaneously before me, just as in individuality of subject they really almost counted as one for me. Whilst still at the musical completion of 'Lohengrin', with which I always felt as if in an oasis in the desert, both subjects took possession of my poetic fancy: these were 'Siegfried' and 'Frederick Barbarossa'.

Though the glorious figure of Siegfried had long since attracted me, yet it only fully enraptured me, when I succeeded in seeing it before me in its purest human form, freed from all subsequent travesty. Then only did I realize the possibility of making him the hero of a drama, which had never occurred to me, so long as I only knew him through the mediæval Nibelungen Song."

(Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. IV, Page 310.)

"In the autumn of the year 1848, I first sketched the complete Myth of the Nibelungen[1]) . . . A second attempt, to give the main catastrophe of the great action, as a drama for our stage, was 'Siegfried's Death'."

(Wagner to Liszt, Albisbrunn, Nov. 20th, 1851.)

"When I sketched 'Siegfried'[2]), I felt, for the present quite apart from the musical form of execution, the im-

1) Gesammelte Schriften. Vol. II.

2) According to Chamberlain, Wagner began the poem of

possibility, or at least the entire unsuitability, of carrying out this poem in modern verse. I had advanced my conception of Siegfried to the point where I saw the Human Being before me in the most natural, genial fulness of his truly living manifestation . . .

But just as this man moved, so necessarily should be his phraseology . . . At the original mythical source, where I found the youthful, handsome Siegfried-man, I also spontaneously met with the truly perfect phraseology, by which alone this man could disclose himself. This, in which the Folk once composed, while it was still Poet and Creator of Myths, was alliterative verse, conforming in accordance with the real accents of speech to the most natural and spirited rhythm, and lending itself easily to the infinitely varied manifestation of that epoch."

(Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. IV, Page 328.)

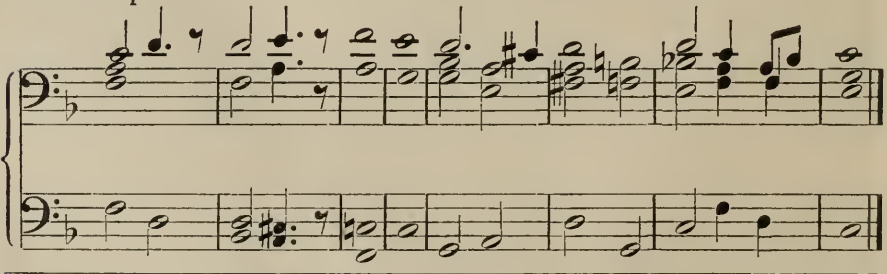
SIEGFRIED'S DEATH.

(Grand Heroic Opera in Three Acts.)

Characters:

Siegfried.	Brünhild.
Gunther.	Gudrune.
Hagen.	The Norns.
Alberich.	Three Water Nymphs.
Vassals.	The Walküres. Women.

Transcription.



'Siegfried's Death' November 12th, 1848, and finished it November 28th, 1848. The Manuscript only contains the following musical sketch.

"Just as, with 'Siegfried', I attained, through the power of my longing, the fountain-head of eternal true Humanity, so now, when I was obliged to recognize this longing anew as insatiable face to face with modern life, and an escape from this life, with the removal of its claims on me, through self-annihilation, as the Redeemer, I reached the fountain-head of all modern conceptions of this condition, namely the human *Jesus of Nazareth* . . . With this meaning, I endeavoured to give vent to my stirred frame of mind, with the sketch of a drama of '*Jesus of Nazareth*'." [1])

(Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. IV, Page 331.)

WAGNER to LISZT, Reuil, June 19th, 1849.

"You know the bitter source of discontent which arose in me from the exercise of my beloved Art, which I nurtured with passion, and finally allowed to burst forth in every sphere, the connection of which I was bound to associate with the ground of my melancholy. From that the craving impulse developed which is herein expressed: 'It must be changed, it cannot remain thus'!

That now, taught namely, by my participation in that Rising, I could never again meddle with a political catastrophe, I surely need hardly affirm; every sensible person will understand it. What rejoices me and what I can firmly assert, is that I have again become entirely the artist in all my aspirations."

WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, October 14th, 1849.

"The poem of my 'Siegfried' lies before me; after not having composed a note for two years, the whole of my artistic being urges me to write the music for it. Whatever I might have hoped from a Parisian success will not now,

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1) Breitkopf and Haertel, 1888.

however, be able even to feed me, for unless wishing to be thoroughly dishonest, I should have to send it to my creditors.

Therefore the point in question is: how and whence am I to provide for my subsistence? — Is my finished work, Lohengrin, worth nothing? Is the Opera which I am anxious to finish, worth nothing? . . . Let somebody buy my Lohengrin from me, hide and hair, — let somebody commission my Siegfried; I will do it cheaply! . . . Oh! what a trouble it is, to be sure, to dispose of such a man as myself in the world!"

WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, December 5th, 1849.

"Since I have recently expressed myself quite fully upon my view of Art, and that in a book entitled: 'The Art-Work of the Future' *(Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft)*, I have now become freed from all inclination towards the Theoretic, and have got so far, as to only feel the desire for Works of Art themselves. I would I had completed my Siegfried. This wish however, could only be fulfilled under specially favourable circumstances, namely, if I were able to look forward to one year free from the cares of life."

WAGNER to LISZT, ? July, 1850.

"Last May I sent the poem of my Siegfried to a bookseller, in order to publish it, just as it is. In a short preface, I profess that I am hopeless as to the execution and performance of this work, and consequently only communicate it to my friends as my design. Indeed I am not composing my 'Siegfried' *'en l'air'*. Now you offer me the artistic fellowship which could bring Siegfried to light. I require performers for heroes, such as our stage has not yet seen; where will they come from? Now, certainly not

from the air, but from the earth, and I think you are the right person to raise them from the earth for me, at least through enthusiastic cultivation ... When you have brought Lohengrin to light to your satisfaction, I shall finish my Siegfried for you, — but for you only, and for Weimar."

WAGNER to UHLIG [1]), Zurich, August 7th, 1850.

"Liszt informs me that it is in the wind, at Weimar, (in the event of a good success with Lohengrin) to order the composition of Siegfried from me, for which purpose they would pay me a sufficient fee in advance, to enable me to live untroubled until the completion of the work. Thereupon I answered him that I should never have composed Siegfried *'en l'air'*, but if Lohengrin should prove thoroughly satisfactory, I should assume that thereby those performers would be trained for me in Weimar, who, with proper zeal and earnestness, would be able to bring Siegfried also to life for me, in the best possible manner. Therefore I should get Siegfried musically ready for production too, expressly for the Weimar Company . . .

Now you inform me, that Wigand will not even print Siegfried. May God be praised! He is wiser than I. Then Liszt comes and orders Siegfried for production at Weimar. That was just the thing! — If they bring Siegfried partially to comprehension in Weimar, that is bound to be more important for me than anything else: what people see they believe, and if they be not many, yet they are certainly more, than I should ever gain or convince through reading. Therefore, for the present, adieu, author! — Let the printing of Siegfried alone, too; it would only cause confusion: keep the Manuscript!"

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1) Chamber musician in Dresden.

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, September 20th, 1850.

"Whether I ought to reserve, or destine Siegfried for a first performance in Weimar, would be on the whole rather a question, which, as matters now stand, I could probably only answer with an unconditional No! That I practically gave up Lohengrin, when I permitted its performance in Weimar[1]), I certainly need hardly assure you . . . Nevertheless, I suppose I need not first give you my further reasons, if I state, that I wish to send Siegfried into the world in a different way than would be possible for the good people there. With reference to this, I am occupying myself with wishes and plans now, which at the first glance appear very chimerical, but which alone give me the inclination to think of the completion of Siegfried at all. It is a question of a sum of perhaps 10,000 Thalers, for the realization of the best, most decisive and most momentous thing which I can accomplish under existing circumstances, as well as for the attainment of my conscious life's work. If I could ever dispose of such a sum, I should arrange the following: — Here, where I now happen to be, and where many things are not at all bad, I should raise a rough theatre of my own design, of planks and beams, in a lovely meadow near the town, and only let it be supplied with the bare equipment in scenery and machinery, which are necessary for the performance of Siegfried. Then I should select the most suitable singers that were existent anywhere, and invite them to Zurich for six weeks; the Chorus I should endeavour to form for the most part here, from volunteers, (there are superb voices here, and strong, healthy people). In this way I should also collect my Orchestra by invitation. At the New Year, the circulars and invitations to all friends of musical drama would appear

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1) August 28th, 1850.

in all the newspapers of Germany, bidding them visit the contemplated dramatico-musical Festival; whoever sent in his name, and travelled for this purpose to Zurich, would obtain an assured Entrée, — of course like all Entrées, gratis! I should furthermore invite the young people, the University, singing clubs, etc. of this place, to the hearing. When everything was in proper order, I should, under these circumstances then allow three performances of Siegfried to take place in a week: after the third the theatre would be torn down, and my score burned. To the people who were pleased with the affair, I should then say: Now, do likewise! But if they really ever wanted to hear anything new of mine again, I should say: Make up a purse! — Now, do I seem stark mad to you? It may be, but I assure you, to achieve this very thing is the hope of my life, the prospect which alone can stimulate me to commence an Art-Work. Therefore, procure me 10,000 Thalers, — that is all!

For the present let us revert from fancies to fact! I do not believe that I shall be able to attack the music of Siegfried seriously this winter; in the first place, winter is, in itself, my arch-enemy; secondly, I shall probably have many, not very elevating, drawbacks . . . Therefore I do not reckon to get to my greater artistic work before the spring; (in the spring of 1852 — perhaps midst a storm — the performance might, accordingly, take place, if Kaskel have presented me with the 10,000 Thalers by then)."

WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, November 25th, 1850.

"Yes, yes! my dear good Liszt! I owe it to you, that I can shortly become quite the artist again. I look upon the final resumption of my artistic plans, to which I am now turning, as one of the most decisive moments of my life: between the musical production of my Lohengrin and that of my Siegfried, there lies for me a stormy, but I

know, a fruitful world. I had a whole life behind me to disentangle, to bring all that was dawning within me to consciousness, to master by its own means, the rising reflection necessary to me, through the most profound penetration of the subject, in order again to throw myself with clear, genial consciousness into the beautiful unconsciousness of creative art. So I shall put the tangle of my past life behind me this winter: I want to enter, free and easily, without any sort of load, into a new world, in which I bring nothing with me except a cheerful, artistic conscience. — My Work, on 'The Essence of Opera', (Das Wesen der Oper), the latest fruit of my meditations, is expanding to greater dimensions than I at first expected . . . When I have finished this book, I intend — if I can find a publisher — to edit my three romantic Opera-poems, with an introductory preface, describing their genesis; then, in order to make a complete clearance, I should compile the best of my Paris essays of ten years ago, (among them my Beethoven novel) into one, perhaps not unentertaining, volume: so that through it, he who interests himself in me, would get acquainted with the beginning of my Movement. Therewith I should then come into spring, happy and relieved, to undertake and finish my Siegfried without interruption."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, May 10th, 1851.

"Now I have reached new results, with that which I am to undertake. If I were to conceive 'Siegfried's Death' with the serious intent of a next year's performance in Weimar, the affair would certainly seem absolutely impossible to me. From whence get performers and public? But an idea has bothered me throughout the whole winter, which recently and finally so completely subjugated me as inspiration, that I shall now realize it. Did I not write

you once before of a gay theme? This was the youth, who sets out 'in order to learn Fear', and is so stupid as never to want to learn it. Imagine my terror, when I suddenly recognize that this youth is no one else but — the young Siegfried. It is now a *fait accompli*. Next month I shall set about the poem of 'Young Siegfried', for which I am now preparing myself. In July the composition will be begun, and such brazen confidence have I in the warmth of the theme and my endurance, that next year I contemplate attaining, quite unweakened, to the composition of 'Siegfried's Death'. 'Young Siegfried' has this enormous advantage, that it teaches the important myth to the public, in play, just like a fairy tale to a child. Everything is imprinted plastically through acute sense impressions, everything is understood, — and when the serious 'Siegfried's Death' comes, the public knows everything, which would have had to be pre-supposed therein, or only just hinted at, and — my game is won, — the more so, as, through my much more popular, more closely allied in every way to consciousness, less heroic than gay, youthfully human 'young Siegfried', the performers can actively practice and prepare themselves to solve the mightier problem of 'Siegfried's Death'. Yet both will be quite independent pieces in themselves, that are only to be presented in succession to the public the first time, but afterwards may be given quite apart, according to will and means. I likewise never have a general, abstract public in view any more, but a distinct one, to which I disclose my meaning, in order to be understood by it."

WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, May 22nd, 1851.

"It is my birthday today . . . As yet, Heaven has not sent me any fine weather, and I am still waiting for the first sunny day, in order to begin the poetry of my

'young Siegfried' with the pen, just as it is already finished in my head. In July I think I shall be able to send you the poem."

WAGNER to UHLIG, June 18th, 1851.

"'Young Siegfried', which I began on the 3rd of June, I shall finish in a week."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, June 24th, 1851.

"Greet the R's a thousand times from me! Tell them, that this morning my 'young Siegfried' came into the world finished and well-rhymed."

WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, June 29th, 1851.

"The poem has given me *great* pleasure, and at all events it is that which I was bound to do, and the best thing which, so far, I have been able to do. I am truly pleased with it! With my impetuous method of working, I am always considerably exhausted at the end, and consequently I must now recruit myself for a short time."

WAGNER to RÖCKL, Zurich, August 24th, 1851.

"My hero has grown up wild in the forest and was fostered by a dwarf, that he might slay the dragon that guards the Treasure. This Nibelungen Treasure constitutes an unusually significant force: — Crime of every kind is attached to it. Siegfried is now pretty much the same young fellow that appears in the fairy tale and sets out, 'in order to learn Fear' — in which he will never succeed, because he, with a strong love of Nature, sees everything just as it is. He slays the dragon, and kills his teacher, the dwarf, who, for the sake of the Treasure, intends to secretly murder him. Siegfried, eagerly craving to escape from his loneliness, now understands the voice of a forest

bird, (which gift he has acquired through accidentally tasting the dragon's blood,) who directs him to Brünhilde, who sleeps on a rock, surrounded by fire. Siegfried traverses the fire and awakens Brünhilde — the Woman — to the most rapturous embrace of Love . . .

In our fervid conversations we already chanced upon this: we are not what we could and should be, until the *Woman* be awakened."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, ? August, 1851.

"I have likewise ordered a copy of my new 'comic Opera' libretto[1]) for Liszt. I am now setting about the music, with which I expect to thoroughly enjoy myself. You cannot imagine it perhaps, but it evolves itself quite spontaneously! I assure you, the musical phrases fit in to these verses and periods, without my even having to trouble about them; everything springs as if wild, from the earth. The beginning I already have in my head, also several plastic *motifs*, like that of Fafner."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Albisbrunn, ? October, 1851.

"Still great plans in my head as regards Siegfried: three dramas with a three-act Prelude."

WAGNER to LISZT, Albisbrunn, November 20th, 1851.

"This 'young Siegfried' also is only a fragment, and it cannot produce its true and indubitable effect as a separate entity until it acquires its requisite place in the complete whole, which I assign to it, (according to my now conceived plan), along with 'Siegfried's Death'. In both of these dramas there remained a quantity of necessary

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1) 'The Young Siegfried.'

allusions left to the narrative alone, or even to the penetration of the hearer. Everything, which at all gives the infinitely touching, far-reaching significance to the action and the characters of both these dramas, had to be omitted from the performance, and could only be conveyed to the mind. But according to my now acquired, innermost conviction, a work of Art — and therefore pure drama — can only produce its proper effect, when the poetic intention is entirely revealed to the senses in all its most important moments; and I, least of all, dare not and cannot sin against the truth as perceived by me. I must, therefore, reveal my whole myth, in its deepest and fullest meaning, with the most artistic clearness, in order to be thoroughly understood; nothing in it must be left, in any way, to be supplemented by thought or by reflection: every simple human sensibility must, through its artistic organ of perception, be able to comprehend the whole, because only then can it properly absorb the details.

Two leading moments of my myth,therefore, still remain for representation, and these are both hinted at in 'young Siegfried': the first in the lengthy narrative of Brünhilde after her Awakening, (Act III); the second in the scene between Alberich and the Wanderer in the Second, and between the Wanderer and Mime in the First Act. You can easily realize however, that not only artistic reflection, but especially the glorious, and for the purpose of representation, unusually productive material of these moments themselves decided me in this, if you view that material more closely. Think of the wondrously fateful Love of Siegmund and Siegelinde; of Wodan in his profoundly mysterious relation to that Love; then in his dispute with Fricka, in his furious self-subjection, when, for the sake of convention, he decrees Siegmund's death; finally the glorious Walküre, Brünhilde, when, divining Wodan's inner-

most thoughts, she defies the God and is punished by him: think of this wealth of suggestion, (such as I refer to in the scene between the Wanderer and the Wala, but afterwards, more diffusely, in Brünhilde's narration,) as material for a drama which precedes the two Siegfried's, and you will understand that not reflection only, but more especially inspiration, prompted my latest plan!

This plan has in view the three Dramas: 1. The Walküre, 2. Young Siegfried, 3. Siegfried's Death. In order to give everything completely, a great Prelude must yet precede these three Dramas: The Theft of the Rhinegold. Its object is the full representation of everything which, in connection with this theft, (the origin of the Nibelungen Treasure, the abduction of this Treasure by Wodan, and Alberich's curse) is spoken of narratively in 'Young Siegfried'. Through the clearness of representation thus made possible, by which everything, at present so diffuse and narrative-like, is removed, or at least condensed into quite concise moments, I now gain sufficient space to heighten the fulness of allusions to utmost impressivenes, whilst with the earlier, half epic production, I had to vexatiously curtail and weaken everything. I mention only one thing: —

"Alberich mounts from the depths of the earth to the three daughters of the Rhine: he pursues them with repulsive wooing; rejected by one, he addresses the other: all of them, joking and teasing, spurn the gnome. Then the Rhinegold begins to glisten, it attracts Alberich; he enquires as to its use? The maidens signify that it serves them for fun and sport; its gleam illumines the depths of the stream with a blessèd lustre: but many wonders could he work with it, (obtaining might and power, wealth and sovereignty by means of the Gold,) who knew how to weld it into a Ring: but only he *who will abjure Love*, could understand that! But in order that no one may rob the

Gold, they have been appointed as its guardians: he who approaches them certainly does not covet the Gold; Alberich at least does not appear to do so, because he seems to be so very much in love. They laugh at him afresh. Then the Nibelung becomes furious: he forswears Love, robs the Gold, and bears it away to the depths." —

Enough of these details! Now to my plan for the practical execution of the whole!

Of a separation of the elements of this great whole I cannot think, without, indeed, again overthrowing my purpose in advance. The entire Cycle of Dramas must be performed together in rapid sequence, and for the outward possibility of that, I can consequently only contemplate the following favourable circumstances. The performance of my Nibelungen Dramas must take place at a great festival, which will perhaps be expressly arranged, just for the purpose of this performance. It must then occur on three consecutive days, on the eve of which the introductory prelude will be given. When I have brought about such a performance under such circumstances, the whole may, in the first place, be again repeated on another occasion, but after that the single dramas, which will form quite independent works in themselves, may be given at pleasure: but in any case, the impression of the complete performance, as intended by me, must have gone before.

Where and under what circumstances such a performance will, in the first instance, be possible, need not concern me for the present at all; for first of all I must execute my great work, and this task, if I take my health into some consideration, will occupy me for at least three years . . .

If my plan now appear to you as overbold, unusual, nay, perhaps fantastic, be assured notwithstanding, that it did not originate in an extraneous, calculated fancy, but

forced itself upon me as the necessary consequence of the nature and substance of the theme, which now suddenly possesses me, and urges me to its entire completion. To complete it, in accordance with the way permissible to me as poet and musician, is, for the present, the only thing that I see before me. Anything else need not worry me at all for the present . . . Now, after all these explanations, I consign to you, my dear friend and brother, the poem of my 'young Siegfried', just as I sketched and executed it, when I still had the separate production in my mind. In connection with the other dramas, it will now naturally experience some changes, especially beneficial abridgments in the narrative portions. A great deal will strike you in it, certainly also the great simplicity, and the allotment of the action to only a few persons. If you think now, of this piece performed between the Walküre and Siegfried's Death, both of which dramas have a much more complicated action, then this forest play, in my opinion, with its youthfully bold solitude, will certainly produce a characteristic and sympathetic impression."

WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, January 30th, 1852.

"As regards the performance of my Nibelungen Dramas, you, my good, sympathetic friend, certainly view the future too brightly for me: I do not at all count upon their performance; I shall at all events not live to see it, and least of all in Berlin or Dresden. These and similar large towns, with their public, no longer exist for me; I can only imagine among my audience, a gathering of friends, who assemble somewhere expressly for the purpose of familiarization with my Work, preferably in some lovely secluded spot, far from the smoke and the industrial odours of our urban civilization; I should look upon Weimar at most, as such a spot, but certainly no larger town. If, however, I

now turn to my great Work, it is really only to seek deliverance from my unhappiness, — oblivion of my life! I have no other aim, and I shall consider myself happy, when I am no longer conscious that I exist."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, March 25th, 1852.

"My great poem engrosses me more and more, with the dawning of spring: soon I shall be at work; its wealth of material already grows nearly to excess, and I must soon begin, so that I shall soon be rid of it. Undoubtedly *that will become something*, it will be the utmost I can do."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, ? May, 1852.

"As yet I do not seem to recover at all, and suffer from sleeplessness, and great prostration. Only once more can I sacrifice myself by arranging for a performance; that is to be, if I ever accomplish it, for my Siegfried. Until then I must completely withdraw from all undertakings of that kind, and *after* Siegfried, in any case, I shall cease."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, May 31st, 1852.

"Now I have finished the complete sketch of the 'Walküre' also; to-morrow the verses will be commenced. I am again more than ever impressed by the extensive grandeur and beauty of my theme; my entire view of the world has found its most complete artistic expression therein . . . After this work, I do not suppose I shall ever write poetry again! It is the supreme and most perfect thing that could issue from my brain. Once the verses are finished, I shall thenceforth become entirely musician again, in order in the future only to be *director!* I almost hope, that I may gain, or retain, the life for it!"

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, July 2nd, 1852.

"I have finished my 'Walküre'. This occurred yesterday, after one month's work . . . I shall not have completed the entire Nibelungen work before the autumn, (September or October;) both of the Siegfrieds' must now be substantially revised, particularly in all that concerns the actual myth of the Gods, for this undoubtedly has now acquired a much more defined and impressive physiognomy. But I am greatly looking forward to the music! . . .

On the whole, I am '*en veine*' today, for when I have finished such a thing as the Walküre, I always feel as if I had perspired a frightful anxiety out of me, an anxiety which always increases towards the end of the task, a species of fear, lest I should spoil something; I always write my signature with the date underneath, in great haste, just as if the devil stood behind me and wanted to deter me from its completion."

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, October 14th, 1852.

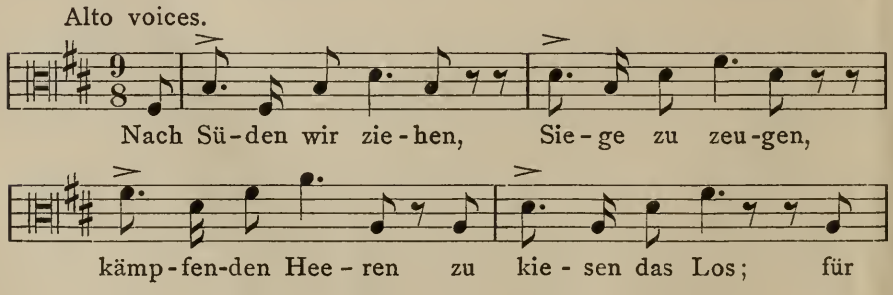
"My chief care is still the Nibelungen Poem; this is the one thing which exalts me greatly and forcibly, as soon as I apply myself to it. The thought of posterity is distasteful to me, and yet this vain illusion comes to me involuntarily now and again, as my poem enters from my soul into life. All that I can do and all I have, is comprised in the following: — to be able to complete it and perform it. I have now decided on the titles: '*The Ring of the Nibelungen*', (Der Ring des Nibelungen,) a stage festival play, to be performed on three days and a preceding evening: — The Rhinegold. First Day: — The Walküre. Second Day: — Young Siegfried. Third Day: — Siegfried's Death. — The preceding evening is really a complete drama, tolerably full of action; full half of it I have now finished;

the Walküre, entirely. Both of the Siegfrieds' must still be substantially revised, chiefly Siegfried's Death. —

But then it will be Something!! . . . Do but study Hafiz thoroughly; he is the greatest and most sublime philosopher. No one has ever been so cognizant of the *Great Thing* as positively and incontestably as he. There is only one thing which he eulogizes:[1]) and everything else is not worth a brass farthing, no matter how high and sublime it may call itself. Something similar will also become manifest in my Nibelungen."

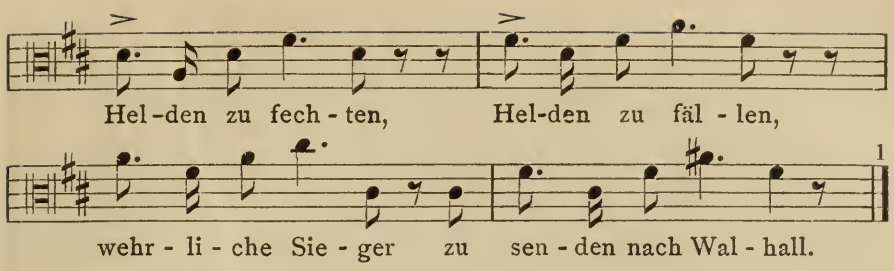
WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, November 9th, 1852.

"What fate will befall this poem, the poem of my life, and of everything which I am and feel, I cannot yet ascertain; this much however, is certain — if Germany be not soon opened to me again, I shall henceforth have to remain without food and stimulus for my artistic existence, as my animal life's instinct drives me to the *abandonment of all Art.* What I shall then take up, in order to prolong my existence, I do not know; but the music to the Nibelungen I shall not compose, and only a savage could require me to remain a slave to my art any longer."



1) Love.

2) He thereby relinquished Brünhilde's scene with the Walküres', in that he, requested for a contribution to an autograph album then ready for print, chose for it the melody of the Walküres' Song. Glasenapp.



Zurich, 12. Nov. 1852.

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, ? November, 1852.

"I am now working at 'Young Siegfried'; soon I shall have finished it. Then comes 'Siegfried's Death' — that will take me longer; in that there are two scenes to compose quite afresh, (the Norns and Brünhilde's scene with the Walküres,) but above all the Conclusion — besides revising everything very considerably. The whole (out with it! I am impudent enough to say so!) will then be the greatest poem, that was ever composed!"

WAGNER to UHLIG, Zurich, December 23rd, 1852.

"When you are hale and hearty again, you also, shall enjoy my Siegfried, for it is now ready."

WAGNER to LISZT, Zurich, February 11th, 1853.

"You see my poem is finished, and although not yet set to music, it is at least type-set and printed, and that — at my own expense, and in only a few copies, which I want to present to my friends, in order that, if I die during the subsequent work, they will have received my bequest in advance. He who knows my circumstances, will, in view of this expensive edition, again consider me very extravagant: let it be so! The world, properly speaking, is, after all, behaving so stingily towards me, that it by no means gives me the desire to imitate it . . . About the poem itself, I do not want and cannot tell you anything more at present: if you find the leisure to read it

through in a loving spirit, then you will say to yourself whatever I should have had to communicate. I shall not write poetry again. The prospect of now setting all this to music causes me great delight: as regards the form, this is entirely conceived within me, and never was I in such accord as to musical execution, as I now am, and with regard to this poem. I need only the necessary *attraction for life*, in order to get into the indispensable cheerful humour, from which the *motifs* will flow readily and joyfully for me. — With regard to this, I once before disclosed my thoughts to you in bitter lament: I asked for deliverance from the deadly situation in which I find myself here in Zurich; I inquired as to the possibility of obtaining permission to occasionally take a trip to Germany, in order to attend a performance of my works, because otherwise I should perish here, from sheer lack of stimulation. You were only able, to your sorrow, to reply to me in the negative, and exhorted me to have — Patience."

WAGNER to RÖCKL, Zurich, January 25th, 1854.

"For me my poem has only the following meaning: — *The Representation of Reality.* Instead of the words: 'A dark day dawns for the Gods: in disgrace thy noble race will surely end, if thou yieldest not the Ring!' I now let Erda merely say: 'All that exists — ends: a dark day dawns for the Gods: I advise thee, avoid the Ring!' — We must learn to die, and moreover to die in the full sense of the word; fear of the end is the source of all lovelessness and it is only generated where Love itself is already waning. How was it, that this greatest salvation of everything living, so far disappeared from the human race, that the latter finally devised everything that it did, established, or founded, merely through fear of the end? My poem points it out. It displays Nature in undisguised

truth, with all its existing contradictions, which, by their unending manifold contact, show their mutual repulsion. It is not that Alberich was rejected by the Rhine-daughters, (which was quite natural on their part), which is the decisive source of the evil; Alberich and his Ring could not harm the Gods, if these had not already been susceptible to evil. Wherein now, lies the root of this evil? Look at the first scene between Wodan and Fricka, which ultimately leads to the scene in the second Act of 'The Walküre'. The firm tie, which binds both, arising from the spontaneous error in Love, to carry it beyond the necessary exchange by a mutual guarantee, this opposition to the Eternal New and Changefulness of the world of phenomena, brings both parties to the mutual pangs of lovelessness. The continuation of the whole poem shows, consequently, how to acknowledge and yield to Necessity, Change, Variation, Multiplicity, and the eternal freshness of Reality and Life. Wodan soars up to tragic heights, in willing — his destruction. This is all we have to learn from the history of Mankind: to desire Necessity and to carry it out oneself. The creative work of this supreme self-annihilating Will, is the ultimately won, fearless, ever-loving man: Siegfried. That is all. As a detail, the mischievous power, the literal poison of love, is condensed into that misused Gold, embezzled from Nature, the Nibelungen Ring: the curse clinging to it is not withdrawn until it has been given back to Nature, and the Gold again lowered into the Rhine. This, also, Wodan only realises quite at the end, at the last stage of his tragic career; that, which Loge repeatedly and touchingly pointed out to him at the outset, was chiefly overlooked by him, in his greed for power; he in the first instance learns, through Fafner's deed, only to recognize the power of the curse; not until the Ring must destroy even Siegfried, does he perceive that only the restitution of the theft will annul

the evil, and therefore unites the condition of his own desired destruction with this annulling of a most ancient Wrong. *Experience* is everything. Even Siegfried alone, (the man alone) is not the perfect Human Being: he is merely the half, and only with Brünhilde does he become the Redeemer; one person *cannot* accomplish everything; many are needed, and suffering, self-sacrificing Woman becomes finally the true, conscious Redeemer: for Love is really 'the Eternal Feminine' itself.

So much for the general and most salient features: in them are contained all the individual and more definite traits . . . It is necessary in drama, as in any work of Art, to operate, not through statement of intentions, but by spontaneous representation. This is just what distinguishes my poetic material from the hitherto, almost solely known, political material. If you, for instance, would like to impress more *intention* on the appearance of Wodan in 'young Siegfried' than I at present allow him to express, you would thereby very considerably weaken the supreme spontaneity intended by me in the development of the whole. Wodan, after his parting from Brünhilde, is in truth, only a departed spirit: in accordance with his great purpose, he can now merely grant full play, and let things take their course, but nowhere may he again definitely interfere; therefore he has now become the 'Wanderer': look at him well! he resembles us to a T; he is the substance of the Intelligence of the Present, whereas Siegfried is the ordained man of the Future, desired by us, who however, cannot be made by us, but must create himself through *our annihilation*. In such a form, you must admit, Wodan is most interesting to us; otherwise he would appear unworthy in our eyes as a subtle schemer, for such he would be, if he gave advice, which, apparently aimed against him, was in reality in Siegfried's, and more especially in his own, interest; that

would be a deception worthy of our political heroes, but not of my jovial God, wishing for his own Fall. Notice how he opposes Siegfried in the third Act! Here, before his Fall, he is at last so spontaneously human, that once again, in opposition to his great purpose, the old pride is stirred, and furthermore (note well!) roused, through — jealousy of Brünhilde; for this has become his most sensitive spot. He does not want to be pushed aside, as it were, but to fall — to be conquered; but even this is so unpremeditated, that in a rapid outburst of passion, he even looks for victory, for a victory which, as he says, must only make him more wretched.

For the manifestation of my ideas, I had to hold my feelings within infinitely subtle bounds; to be sure, my hero should not convey the impression of an absolutely unconscious Being: in Siegfried I have, on the contrary, endeavoured to represent my conception of the most perfect Human Being, whose highest consciousness is expressed therein, that all consciousness reveals itself only in the life and action of the immediate present; how prodigiously I exalt this consciousness which may hardly ever be uttered, will be made clear to you in Siegfried's scene with the Rhine-daughters; here we learn that Siegfried is infinitely wise, for he is aware of the highest thing: that Death is better than a life of Fear; he knows about the Ring also, but he disregards its power, because he has something better to do; he keeps it merely as a witness thereof, that he — has not learnt to know Fear. Confess, that before this man all the splendour of the Gods must die! I am chiefly struck by your question: why, now that the Rhinegold has been given back to the Rhine, should the Gods still perish? I believe that with a good performance, even the most naïve person will be quite in accord on this point. To be sure, the Fall does not proceed from contrapuntal

laws:[1]) these could, after all, be explained, twisted, and turned (one would merely need to employ a juridical politician as lawyer for that;) but from our innermost feelings there arises, as with Wodan from his feelings, the necessity for this destruction. Everything depends therefore, upon the justification of this necessity through the feelings, and this will happen quite spontaneously to him who, with perfect sympathy, from the very beginning, follows the course of the plot with all its simple, natural ideas; when, finally, Wodan gives utterance to this necessity, he only tells us what we already deem necessary. When Loge, at the end of the Rhinegold, says of the Gods entering Walhalla: 'They are hastening to their End, who think themselves of such sturdy existence', he surely at this moment only expresses our own feeling, as whoever follows this Prelude with sympathy, not brooding and pondering, but allowing the incidents to work on his feelings, must fully agree with Loge.

Let me tell you something more about Brünhilde. You misunderstand her also, if you deem her refusal to yield the Ring to Wodan, cruel and obstinate. Did you not experience the feeling, that Brünhilde was separated from Wodan and all the Gods — for the sake of Love, because, where Wodan was indulging in schemes, she — only loved? From the moment Siegfried completely awakens her, she no longer has any knowledge but the knowledge of Love. Now, the symbol of this Love, when Siegfried went away from her, is this Ring: when Wodan demanded it of her, only the reason of her separation from Wodan came to her mind, (that she acted from motives of Love,) and only one thing does she know, viz: that she has renounced all Di-

1) Wagner here speaks in musical figures, his literal meaning being: "The Fall does not proceed from *a legal standpoint*". (C. de C. P.)

vinity for the sake of Love. She knows, however, that Love is the only Divinity, therefore Walhalla's splendour may perish, but the Ring — (Love) — she will not sacrifice. I pray you to see how pitiful, mean and sordid she would appear, if she refused the Ring for the reason that she, (perhaps through Siegfried,) knew of its spell and the power of its Gold? This you certainly will not impute in earnest to this glorious woman? If, however, it shock you, that this woman should preserve just this accursèd Ring as the symbol of Love, you will feel as I do, and thus recognize the power of the Nibelungen curse in its most dreadful, most tragic climax: *then* you will indeed recognize the necessity for the whole final drama, 'Siegfried's Death'. We had still to experience this, in order to be fully aware of the power of the Gold. Why did Brünhilde submit so soon to the disguised Siegfried? Simply because he snatched the Ring from her, which held her only remaining means of strength. The dreadful, demoniacal part of the whole Scene has altogether escaped you: through the fire, which according to destiny as well as experience, only Siegfried shall and can traverse, another forces his way, quite easily, to her: everything staggers before Brünhilde, everything is out of joint; in a terrible struggle she becomes overpowered, she is 'forsaken by God'. And moreover it is — Siegfried in reality, who orders her to share the couch with him — Siegfried, whom she (unconsciously, but all the more confusedly,) almost recognizes, notwithstanding his disguise, by his shining eyes. (You must feel that something quite unspeakable occurs here, and therefore are very wrong to interpolate me into speaking about it!) . . .

How much of the whole essence of my poetical meaning will only become clear through the music, I again plainly see: I cannot bear to look at the music-less poem any more. In course of time I shall hope to impart the com-

position to you also. For the present only this much, that it has become a solid, intricate unity. The Orchestra plays scarcely a measure, which is not developed from some preceding *motif* . . . How I shall bring about the performance finally, is, of course, a huge problem. But I shall attack it in due course, because otherwise I could see no suitable object in life for me in the future. I believe, with tolerable certainty, that all the purely mechanical part of the undertaking could be brought about: but, my performers?! There I heave a deep sigh. Naturally I must depend on young people, who are not yet quite ruined by our operatic stage: so-called 'celebrities' are not to be thought of. How I can train my young folk will also have to be seen; preferably I should like to have my troupe together for a year, without letting them appear in public; I should then go about among them every day, verse them in Humanity and Art, and gradually let them mature for their task. Under the most favourable circumstances therefore, I could not count on a first performance before the summer of 1858. But let it delay as long as it will, it always stimulates me, to such concentrated activity for a particular purpose of my own, once more setting before me a necessity for life."

WAGNER to RÖCKL, August 23rd, 1856.

"The epoch, since which I have created by spiritual intuition, began with the 'Flying Dutchman'; 'Tannhäuser' and 'Lohengrin' followed, and if a poetic element be expressed in them, it is that of the great tragedy of Renunciation, the well-defined, appearing ultimately of necessity, sole redeeming Negation of the Will. It is this profound trait which gave the inspiration to my poetry and my music, without which, all the real emotion which they exercise, could not become peculiarly their own. Now,

nothing is more striking, than that with all my conceptions directed towards the speculation and mastery of the comprehension of Life, I worked diametrically contrary to the underlying intuition in them. In that which as artist I contemplated with such cogent certainty, that all my characters became moulded thereby, I endeavoured as philosopher to obtain quite an opposite explanation of Life, which, maintained with great forcibility, was, to my own surprise, always completely overthrown by my spontaneous, purely objective, artistic intuition. The most striking thing in this respect, I was finally forced to experience with my Nibelungen poem: I framed it at a time when I, with my conceptions, had only erected a Hellenistic-optimistic world, the realization of which I absolutely thought possible, as soon as Mankind wanted it, whereupon I tried, rather skillfully, to extricate myself from the problem as to why it did not want it. I recall now, having in this intentional, creating sense, seized hold of the individuality of my Siegfried, with the wish to represent a painless existence; I thought, however, to express myself still more clearly in the representation of the whole Nibelungen Myth, with the exposure of the first Wrong, out of which a whole world of Wrong originates, which is made to perish, in order to give us a lesson as to how we should recognize Wrong, eradicate its roots, and found a just world in its stead. I scarcely noticed, however, while occupied with the execution, indeed in reality with the delineation of the plan, that unconsciously quite another, much deeper intuition followed, and instead of a *phase* of the evolution of the world, the *essence* of the world itself, seen in all its barely conceivable phases, with all its vanity, was acknowledged, whereby, as I remained true to my intuition, but not to my conceptions, something quite different naturally came to light, from what I had planned. Yet I recollect finally, having

once forcibly asserted my purpose, and indeed the only time, in the biassed closing phrase, in which Brünhilde addresses the bystanders, and points from the corruptness of possession to peerless, beatific Love, without (unfortunately!) really becoming clear herself as to this 'Love', which, in the course of the myth, we really saw revealed as thoroughly destructive. Thus I was quite blinded at this place by the intervention of my conceived purpose. In the strangest way this passage tormented me continuously, and truly a great revolution in my rational conception was needed, such as was finally brought about by Schopenhauer,[1]) to show me the reason of my distress, and to furnish me with the really adequate keystone for my poem, which consists of a frank acknowledgment of the true, profound order of things, without being thereby in the least prejudiced."[2])

Vienna, 1862.

"I resolved upon the complete publication of my poem of the 'Nibelungen Ring', partly with the view to procuring for it, in the first place, literary notice, but partly also, in order to give to this desired notice the only direction useful to me at the moment of the real performance of my Work . . . A complete performance of the actual dramatic poem should take place in mid-summer, with 'Rhinegold' on a preceding evening, and on three ensuing evenings the principal pieces, 'Walküre', 'Siegfried' and 'Dusk of the Gods' (Die Götterdämmerung)! (Ges. Schr., Vol. VI, P. 272.)

1) It is a strange coincidence and not generally known, that although the Nibelungen Ring in many ways so resembles Schopenhauer's 'Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung' as to be thought to be based on it, Wagner did not become acquainted with Schopenhauer's writings until after the publication of the Nibelungen Ring, in 1854! See H. S. Chamberlain's fine work: 'Richard Wagner', Page 145. (C. de C. P.)

2) This Conclusion was also discarded later, for the present one. (C. de C. P.)

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